Indian Dance Mudras - An Interesting Insight

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Introduction

Art is a fascination that can attract all. It possesses a multidisciplinary quality which includes, Uniqueness, identity, index, flexibility, transparency. The classical dancers acquire all these qualities and exhibit. Distinctive features like their bodily movements, hand gestures, facial expressions, costumes, jewellery, make-up, music compassion, and Tala patterns. These features differ from one classical dance to another but while researching about hasta mudras, its meaning and usages are similar. This makes the hand gestures unique.

In early times hasta was referred to as ‘Mudra’ and by the following years, Hasta means Hand and symbol forms during the movements of fingers like folding, stretching, half-folding, expanding, and joining are said to be ‘Mudra’. Abhinaya Darpanam says gesture plays an important role in communication among the primitive people. Even now, gestures are used when there is a language barrier and some of the emotions cannot be expressed adequately without the hand movements. When these hand gestures form definite patterns, it's termed as asthas. Hastas are classified as Asamyuta (single hand) and Samyuta (double hand) gestures.

These mudras are used by people in different fields such as Yoga, Hinduism, Jainism, and Buddhism and are benefitted. Both Samyuta and Asamyuta hastas differ from text to text into number and the way of holding(position) but it is similar in meaning and utilization.

In Nandikesvara’s Abhinaya Darpanam (2013), 28 Asamyutahastas and 24 Samyuta hastas (p.xxxix) were marked and gives a detailed long list about each mudra’s viniyoga and its usages. Generally, most research articles on mudras were on healing and dealt with utmost all the therapeutically methods. Unlike those, this research article is distinct by selecting three specific mudras of 52 and focussing only on three mudras.

The objectives of this article are
- Highlighting mudras’ viniyoga and its usages.
- Revealing the feelings of mudras that were hidden by our ancestors.
- Diagnosing the positive vibrations while holding a mudra.
- Proposing the usage of mudras which were not spoken in the classical texts.

- Validation for selecting the three Mudras
In this period (COVID-19), the entire world seeks positive vibrations. This article assures that by productively using these mudras, one can achieve an adequate feel of positive vibrations. Upholding the fact that each mudra has a specific vibration which is accepted by all.

- Distinctive features of the Three mudras
  - Pataka - Neutral, Grasping and accepting anything(positive or negative) according to the mood
  - Alapadma - Happiness, Joy
  - Anjali - Devotion, Respecting, and Humility.
1. Pataka Hasta – Usage and Characteristic Features

The very first mudra in Asamyuta Hasta is Pataka hasta. In Pancha Marabu, Pataka hasta has been classified under Aankai (male-hand gestures). The definition of Pataka hasta mentioned in Abinaya Darpanam is

“Angulyahkuncitangusthahsamslistahprasrtayadi
Sa patakarakarhproktonrtya karma visaradaih”

This viniyoga says, when the thumb is bent and its tip is at the root of the forefinger and the palm and the four fingers are stretched, it becomes Pataka hasta.

1.1 Pataka hasta viniyoga
Anitha Vallabh (2013) says,

“Natyarambhevarivahe vane vasthumiSheDhane
kuchasThalenishaayaamchanadhiyaaamamaramaranaNdale
thurangekhandanevaayaushayनe gamanodhyame
prathaapa cha prasaadhe cha chandhrikaayaamghanathape
kavaatapatanesapthavibhakthyarThetharangake
veeThipraveshahbaavepisamathve cha angaraagake
aathmaaraTheshapaThechaapithooShNeembhaavanidharshane
thaalapathre cha kete cha dhavvaadhisparshanethaThaa
aasheervaadhakriyaayaamchanpashreShTasyabhaavavane
thatrathathrethivachanesindhau cha sukruhkrame
samboDhanepurogepikhadgaroopyaDhaarane
maasesamvathsarevarShadhinesammaarjanethaThaa
yevamarTheShuyufyantheathaaka hasta bhaavanah” (pp. 82,83,84)

1.2 Meaning of Sloka
Beginning of Natya, clouds, forest, forbidding things, breast, night, river, heaven, horse, cutting, wind, lying down, walking, prowess, favour, moonlight, strong sunlight, open or close the door, indicating seven cases of grammar, waves, a road, entering, equality, applying the sandalwood paste, one’s self, taking an oath, silence, Palmyra leaf, shield, touching the things, benediction, an ideal king, indicating in such and such place, sea, series of good things, addressing a person, going forward, holding a sword, month, year, rainy day, sweeping.

Interpreting the usage of Patakahasta we can see,
- Seasons - Year, Month, Day, Rain, Cloud, etc.,
- Materials - Palmyra leaf, Sword, Shield
- Actions - Forbidding things, Cutting, Walking, Sleeping, Open & Close the door, Entering the street, Applying sandal paste, Silence, Taking an oath, Benediction, Touching, Saying, etc.,
- Things reacting joyous mood – River, Wind, Bosom, Night, Wave, An ideal king, Equality, Prowess, Word of gods, etc.,
• Personal planners - Meaning of the seven cases, One’s self, Addressing (a person some distance away)

1.3 Reference to PanchaBootha
Analyzing the above, Pataka is a prowess mudra as it incorporates the contradicted actions with the aptness of the meaning. Pataka is not simply conjoint of five fingers. In the book Mudras of India, Cain Carrol, (2013) represents the five senses concerning Panchaboothas
• Angustha (Thumb) - Agni, Wisdom, Power
• Tarjani (Index finger) - Vayu, Compassion
• Madhyama(Middle finger)- Akash, Trust, Creativity
• Anamika (Ring finger) - Prithvi, Stability, Support
• Kanishtha (Little finger) - Jal/Apas, Wellbeing.

Each possesses variant forms and qualities and are elated to the five senses. Thus pataka establishes a neutral. When a person holds Pataka and meditates for 5 minutes he/she will experience a beautiful positive vibe. In the case of a dancer, doing Pataka mudra viniyoga with hand and eye movements as said by Anitha Vallabh (2013),

“Yatohastodrstriryatodrstristatomanaha
Yatomanastatobhavoyatobhavastatorasaha” (pp. 31,32)

Meaning – Wherever the hand moves, the glance should follow; where the glances are pointing, the mind should follow; where the mind is fixed, there expression should follow; where bhava is expressed, there is rasa.

He/she can experience certain beneficiaries such as
• reduced depression
• increasing stamina
• proper blood and contentment and
• the composure of mind which is already felt by our ancestries.

1.4 Mention of Patakahasta in Bharatarnava of Nandikeswara
Nandikeswara (1998) says in Chapter 4 – The Uses of Hastas according to Brhaspati
“Pataka (Asamyuta No.1) is used to denote the act of touch, in asking for a gift, to indicate absence of attachment, to denote a street, to indicate an entry, in showing changes of form, to indicate the application of cosmetics, to denote one-self, in declaring a vow, to indicate silence, to denote a bull, to indicate excellence, in showing the act of embracing, in showing the act of wailing, to denote a sword, to show the act of running, to denote a bedstead, to denote water, to indicate the sea, to denote milk, and to indicate slight bending. The mudrais also used for expressing the idea of ‘then and there’, to indicate a wavy form, and in receiving something to make one’s own”. (pp. 63,34)

Some special uses of Patakahasta
• To denote an act of cunning, both the hands hold Pataka facing each other and embracing each other.
• To denote dejection or like feeling, Pataka mudras are held a little away from the shoulders.
• To denote an adventure, Pataka mudras in both the hands are held pointing upwards and facing oneself. It is also used to denote a mirror or a look.
• For denoting a prohibition, Patakas are held facing outward.
• Patakafacing downward is used for denoting prohibition or sudden motionless. The same mudra is used to show the consideration of pros and cons, in understanding the purport of scriptures, and to denote haughtiness and like attitudes. (p. 574)

1.5 Uses of Pataka which were not Mentioned in Texts
The following usages of Pataka which were not mentioned in the texts and, are used in daily life are Salute, Attention, Rubbing back, Rising beloved’s chin, Flying kiss, Exclaiming, Wiping tears, Waving hands, Beating on the head in Frustration, To receive something, To indicate chopping vegetables, Close the objects, Stop, Shut your mouth, Stay there, Wait, Mobile phone, Come, Go, Applying powder,soap/cream
on face, Abhaya hasta (to bless), Scold, Slap. Likewise, Pataka is used for different actions in our day today life.

1.6 Usage in Adavus
Depending on the styles of Bharatanatyam adavus differ in number. Some adavus using Pataka are Paravaladavu, Kathi Adavu and Kidatakatarikitathom. Both Paravaladavu and Kathi adavu were set in Adi tala (8*4 = 32). Kidatakatarikitathom was set in Rupaka tala (6*4 = 24). It is also termed as Teermanaadavu. It is harder to do these three adavus in a proper form. It is to be done in ‘Araimandi’ (half sit) in I, II, III speeds. By practicing these adavus a dancer can efficiently perform other adavu.

1.7 Perspective of Ancestors
In Theermanaadavu, the lower part of the body will remain in araimandi which are fully balanced by the lower limbs, and the upper torso will be balanced by the hasta mudra i.e. Pataka. While performing this whole adavu, the angashudham should be stiff along with the Pataka, or else the beauty of the whole adavu will not reach the audience. The ancestor has set this adavu in such a beautiful way through which an artist gathers the energy of the PanchaBootha while performing. While doing this adavu the Pataka hastas the energy of PanchaBootha and while changing the Patakato Katakamukha The energy of Akash, Vayu, and Agni are gathered together, and while stretching the hand, pointing the Prithvi he energy of Jal and Prithvi remains together. And thus, in these four counts, the whole energy of this PanchaBootha merges with the energy of a dancer which is also a therapy. Hence the body and mind of a dancer will have a linear communication. A dancer must understand the usage of the mudras and its hidden therapy which were said by our ancestors.

2. Alapadma Hasta – Usage and Characteristic Features

![Image Source: Dr. G. J. Leema Rose (2017)](image)

The twentieth mudra in Asamyuta Hasta is Alapadma hasta. In PanchaMarabu, Alapadma hasta has been classified under Aankai (male-hand gestures).

2.1 Alapadma hasta viniyoga
Anitha Vallabh (2013) says,

“Vikacha-abjaeKapitthadiphalaechaAavarthakaeKuchae
VirahaeMukuraepoorna-chandraesowndarya-bhavanae
dhamillaechandrashalayamgramaeUddhatakopayohe
TatakaeShakataechakravakaeKalakalaravaeShlaganae
So alapadmaschchaKeertiteBharatagamae” (pp. 104,105)

2.2 Meaning of Sloka
Vikacha-abja – A fully bloomed lotus; Kapittha-diphala – wood apple; Aavarthaka – circular movement; Kucha – breast; Viraha – yearning to the beloved; Mukura – mirror; Poorna-chandra – full moon; Sowndarya-bhavana – beautiful form; Dhamilla – hair-knot; Chandra-shala – moon pavilion; Grama – village; Uddhathakopa – great anger; Tataka – pond or lake; Shakata – cart; Chakravaka – a type of bird; Kala-kalarava – murmuring sound; Shlagana – praise
The speciality of this mudra is the whole sentiments or bhavas which are used in Natyam can be showed in this mudra for example through this mudra a dancer can express the following sentiments such as the Aacharyam as sthayibhavam; Rathi or shringaram as sancharibhavam; Nayagan or Nayagi as Vibhavam; and nature as Anubavam. The term alar means blossom and Padma refer to lotus or flower. Hence the term Alapadma means fully blossomed flower.

2.3 Usages of this mudra
This mudra is used to show the full blossomed lotus, the beautiful face, full moon, hair not, separation from the loved one, a village, sun and so on which were mentioned in the classical texts. Apart from the usages mentioned in the texts, Alapadma hastas are also used in day to day life, such as thinking by keeping the hands-on cheeks, showing the vibrations around us, showing the birth, eating, showing the pot, the round face, a big rock, showing any many thinking, showing the extreme happiness, the greatness, while saying don’t know.

2.4 Usage in Adavus
This mudra is mainly used in Nattadavu, Paravaladavu, Kuditamettadavu, and in Theerama Adavu. It is one of the commonly used mudras in Nritta. This mudra is mostly used in most of the adavus. Among that in Kudithumettuadavu, Paichaladavu, Tha hatha jam ithartha, this mudra was set in such a graceful way. There is a close relationship between the Alapadma and Katakamukhamudra. Where ever the dancer uses the Alapadnamudra, the Katakamukhamudra is used. there is also a school which was named after this mudra, 'The Alapadma School of Dance'.

2.5 Benefits of this mudra said by the ancestors
As the ancestors said, there are vibrations for all mudras which heals the body with the help of the energy of the five elements. In this mudra, the fingers are stretched and separated from each one which creates a stretch in the nerves of the finger and this will become a therapy. Sakthi Bhakti (April 29) says, “Stimulates all five fingers and therefore activates all Five Elements in the body, improves circulation and benefits the heart, boosts vitality and energizes body and mind. According to yoga or Ayurveda, this mudra is used to improves the immunity of the body and increase the positive energy”.

2.6 Alapadma in other texts
Alapadma is the name of the dance mudra (hand gesture) that represents the fully opened lotus and can be found in the ancient texts on Indian dance and theatre namely the Natyasastra and the Abhinaya Darpanam, which serve as invaluable repositories of knowledge for most Indian classical dance forms. Apart from these texts, the information of Alapadma is given in the following texts,

2.6.1 Iconography texts (since this mudra is used in many sculptures)
Marie Stella (2012) says in her Ph.D. thesis,

- Alapadma hasta or simply Alapadma refers to blossomed lotus, happiness and represents one of the twenty-four gestures with a single hand, as defined according to texts dealing with silpa (arts and crafts), known as silpasastras. Accordingly, pratima-laksana (body postures of the icons) is comprised of hand gestures (hasta, mudra or kai-amaiti), stances/poses (asanas) and inflections of the body (bhanga). There are thirty-two types of hands [viz., alapadma hasta] classified into two major groups known as tolirkai (functional and expressive gestures) and elirkai (graceful posture of the hand).

- The many aspects of the lotus such as Srishti Sarasija (signifying creation), Padae (mythology), Leela Kamala (romance), Alankaara Ambuja (iconography) and Sahasrara Padnam (human wisdom) will be brought alive through music and dance.

- The lotus is a flower sacred to nature and the divine, and representative of both the abstract and the physical universe. It is also emblematic of the productive powers within and borne out of the spiritual and physical realms. It was held sacred in antiquity by the Hindus, the Egyptians, and thereafter by
the Buddhists. Revered in China and Japan, and adopted as a Christian emblem by the Greek and Latin Churches, the symbolism of the lotus is an enigma worthy of exploration.

2.6.2 Mention of Alapadmahasta in Bharatarnava of Nandikeswara

Nandikeswara (1998) says in Chapter 4 – The Uses of Hastas according to Brhaspati

To denote changed in features, or the pangs of separation, the hands holding Alapadma mudra (Asamyuta No. 20) starts from the navel and is given a winding movement of Udvestita (the hands going upward, the first finger going out first). To indicate sweetness or courtesy, this mudra is held above the shoulders. To denote ghee clarified from fresh butter, the mudra is held near the mouth, and if a winding movement upward is added, it denotes the sweer condiment called Modaka. When held above the head it is used to denote a lotus or a crown, and when held near the abdomen it denotes the lotus of the plexus near the navel. (pp.84, 85)

Some special uses of Alapadma hasta

- Alapadmaheld at the ear with a shake is used to denote a wholesome application to the ear.
- The abhinaya of a deity is shown when the hands holding Alapadma are bent as also the feet and the hands are held slightly extended.
- If Alapadma is shaken in front it denotes a thing of beauty.
- If Alapadmamain the right hand is held over Alapadma in the left, it denotes surprise or a promiscuous group.
- If Alapadma in both hands at the chest it denotes things celestial.
- Alapadma in both hands allowed to hang freely on either side in Dola form is used to denote either illness, deep sorrow, intoxication or unconsciousness.
- Alapadma pointed towards the sides is used for something at the side.
- Alapadma Dola form accompanies the normal standing posture when a character appears on the stage. When the same mudra is shaken it is used to denote playfulness or excitement. (pp. 580,581)

3. Anjali Hasta – Usage and Characteristic Features

Anjali is the first mudra of the 24 Samyuta hastas. Anjali mudra is a gesture of devotion and respectful greetings in which both hands are clasped together with the fingers upward and palms touching. It is held near the chest. Devotees and minor deities are often portrayed in this pose. It is said that Anjali mudra is used as a posture of composure, of returning to one’s heart, while greeting someone or saying goodbye, initiating, or completing an action. Anjali Mudra is also known as Pranam Mudra, Namaste Mudra, or the prayer position. Most of the time, we perform it with our hands in the center of our heart chakra. This represents the balance and harmony between the right and left sides reunited in our center. This balance can be not only physical but also mental and emotional. The idea is to bring us to the center to prepare ourselves for meditation and contemplation. Anjali mudra is offering one’s lower self to the higher self during meditation. This mudra activates Anahata chakra or heart-centre in the subtle body.
3.1 Anjalihasta viniyoga
Anitha Vallabh (2013) says,

“Devataguruvipranknamaskareswaravukramat
Karyahashiromukhorasthoviniyogeanjalirbudhaihi” (p. 126)

3.2 Meaning of Sloka
Anjali is a divine offering. Anjali mudra also called atmanjali or hridayanjali, is used as a form of greeting by joining the palms of hands, in front of the heart, face, or crown of the head. The fingers point skyward. While making salutation to a deity or its form.

3.3 Usages of this mudra
This mudra is used to offer salutation to God, Elders, Teachers, and a Brahmin. The Anjalimudra is kept above the head to offer salutations to God. It is kept in front of the face to offer respect to the Teachers and Elders. It is kept in front of the chest to offer pranams to the twice-born or the Brahmans.

3.4 Usages of this mudra in daily life
This mudra is used as the symbol by politicians, by the air hostess to welcome the passengers, and in the temples while praying to god.

3.5 Benefits of mudra
Bringing together the palms in this mudra connects the right and the left hemispheres of the brain and connects the practitioner with spirituality/god/divinity. It promotes respect for oneself and others. It is considered a natural remedy for stress and anxiety and is useful for entering into a meditative state. The Anjali mudra is also seen in Buddhism, Hinduism, and many other religions. Of course, in the West, it is seen as being the hand gesture of prayer. Anjali mudra is so closely associated with religion, many non-religious people do not wish to make the gesture. It believes Anjali mudra has a lot of spiritual, mental, and emotional benefits.

Dr. Raghuram Y.S. MD (Ay) & Dr. Manasa, B.A.M.S have said,
- Anjali mudra is most commonly used for meditation.
- The Anjali Mudra is associated with spirituality.
- The most effective mudra for anger control.
- It brings peace to mind and mind. All nervousness is removed from the body.
- Anjali mudra also brings balance to the right and left hemispheres of the brain.
- The brain improves concentration and core awareness.
- Scientists worldwide have argued that it brings harmony and peace in your life.

3.6 Anjali mudra in Yoga practice
Anjali Mudra is the easiest mudra to learn as every child is taught this gesture since the time they could consciously learn how to fold hands. When used in Yoga, doing this mudra means bringing both the palms together in front of the heart chakra, with the fingers pointing upwards. The hands need to be pressed evenly and firmly together. Every Surya Namaskar starts with the practitioner bringing their hands in Anjali mudra. While doing the Anjali mudra, it is important to be aware of the sensations that happen when you bring your palms together. Doing it slowly can make it easier for us to feel the vibrations. As we do it several times, we can notice the change in vibrations.

3.7 Power of Anjali Mudra
Dr. Raghuram Y.S. MD (Ay) & Dr. Manasa, B.A.M.S have said,
Globally, the Namaste gesture is practiced fondly because it is one sign that can exhibit greeting, humility, and gratitude simultaneously. And, the one doing it will also experience the same feeling of groundedness and humility. This is the first benefit of Anjali mudra, allowing you to internalize the external experience of humility and groundedness.

Some other benefits of the mudra include:
• The coming together of both hemispheres of our brain when we do the Anjali mudra channelizes our thought process temporarily. You can feel your mind experiencing positive thoughts during the practice.
• Slow breathing during the process of Anjali mudra and its connection to the heart improves the circulation of oxygen in the blood. It also balances the breathing pattern, calming an agitated mind instantly.
• Practicing Anjali mudra regularly brings more awareness, enhances concentration, and calms the mind thereby relieving stress.
• Physically it improves flexibility of the arm joints and wrists.
• Aside from stimulating the Anahata chakra, the regular practice of Anjali mudra is seen to stimulate the Ajna chakra as well. Anahata Chakra is located in the center of our chest and its stimulation helps us deal with our emotions in a better way. Ajna Chakra is located in the middle of the eyebrows and is the concentration center of our body. Stimulating it increases our focus and memory prowess.

3.8 Meaning of Anjali in text
There are some famous texts which give information’s about this mudra apart from the classical texts. Some of the texts are

3.8.1 Ayurveda (the science of life)
Anjali is the Sanskrit word representing a measure of corn (sufficient to fill both hands when placed side by side). This measurement equals a single Kudava unit, which is a weight unit used throughout Ayurvedic literature.

3.8.2 Purana and Itihasa (epic history)
Anjali- A mode of worship with both hands. He who worships a god by raising only one hand is liable to have that hand cut off. It is a type of gesture (angika) made with combined hands (samyutahasta); Instructions: Putting together of the two Pataka hands is called Anjali. Uses: It is used to greet gods, venerable persons (guru), and friends. In greeting gods it is to be held on the head, in case of venerable persons like father, teacher, etc. it is to be held near one’s face, and for greeting the friends it is to be placed on the chest and in case of the remaining persons there are no fixed rules.

3.8.3 Shilpashastra (iconography)
Marie Stella (2012) says, Anjali or refers to “devotion” and represents one of the four gestures with both hands, as defined according to texts dealing with silpa (arts and crafts), known as silpasastras. Accordingly, pratima-laksana (body postures of the icons) is comprised of hand gestures (hasta, mudra or kai-amaiti), stances/poses (asanas) and inflections of the body (bhangas). There are thirty-two types of hands [viz., Anjalihasta] classified into two major groups known as tolirki (functional and expressive gestures) and elirkai (graceful posture of the hand).

There are many texts which give the definitions of Anjali mudra. Anjali Mudra is a large part of the culture and practice of yoga. This gesture signifies the potential for an intention to progress to greatest spiritual awakening. When done properly the palms are not flat against each other; the knuckles at the base of the fingers are bent a little, creating space between the palms and fingers of the two hands resembling a flower yet to open, symbolizing the opening of our hearts.

Conclusion
Mudras are also used as therapy by our ancestors. There are many mysterious benefits of these mudras of which we are not aware and which are not mentioned in any texts. There are some yogis, who used these mudras as the healing therapy for the body. These mudras have healing therapy through which our immunity power increases. These three mudras are part of our culture and the practice of yoga. All these gestures signify the potential for an intention to progress the great spiritual awakenings. While doing all the mudras in a proper way with realizing the vibrations absorbs by the body from nature, can improve the immunity system in our body which is most important for everyone in the current situation.